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Fiftieth session

REPORT OF THE FOURTEENTH MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE (9-11 February 1999)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The meeting was opened by the Chairman of the Executive Committee, His Excellency, Ambassador Victor Rodriguez Cedeño (Venezuela). The Chairman informed the Committee that delegations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Eritrea, the Republic of Guinea, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Republic of Liberia, the Kingdom of Nepal, the Republic of Lithuania, the Republic of Panama and Turkmenistan had requested to participate in meetings of the Standing Committee during 1999 as Observers, and suggested that their participation begin immediately, in line with the Executive Committee's decision on Observer participation taken in 1998 (A/AC.96/911). Delegations agreed to this proposal. The Chairman also welcomed non-governmental organization (NGO) delegations attending the Standing Committee for a second year as observers, as a result of the decision by the Standing Committee at its extraordinary meeting on 8 December 1998, to extend these arrangements for the years 1999 and 2000 (EC/49/SC/CRP.2). The meeting was chaired as from item 3 (I) (b) by His Excellency, Ambassador Raimundo Pérez-Hernández y Torra (Spain), Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee.

II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA OF THE FOURTEENTH MEETING, THE REPORT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING AND THE WORK PROGRAMME OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE IN 1999

2. The agenda (EC/49/SC/CRP.2), the draft report of the extraordinary meeting of the Standing Committee held on 8 December 1998, (EC/49/SC/CRP.3) and the work programme of the Standing Committee in 1999 (EC/49/SC/CRP.9) were adopted without revision.

III. ASSISTANT HIGH COMMISSIONER'S STATEMENT

3. The Assistant High Commissioner then delivered an opening statement to the Standing Committee, updating delegations on recent developments in UNHCR's operations around the world. In addition, he informed delegations of the recent reorganization of UNHCR's Headquarters structure.

IV. PROGRAMME AND FUNDING

4. Under this agenda item, the Standing Committee had several sub-items for consideration:

A. Overall programme and funding projections

5. The Standing Committee had before it a conference room paper entitled *Overall Programme and Funding Projections for 1998 and 1999* (EC/49/SC/CRP.4).

6. In the absence of the Director of the Division of Operational Support, the aspect of the agenda item dealing with programming issues was introduced by the former Director of the Division. He drew attention to the provisional nature of the 1998 figures, as the accounts for 1998 had not yet been finalized. He said that UNHCR would, most likely, face again a serious funding situation in 1999. The approved 1999 General Programmes target was $ 413 million; needs under Special Programmes were currently estimated at $ 482 million. He recalled the Assistant High Commissioner's earlier comments on the exercise currently under way in UNHCR to review programmes and to establish global and regional priorities for 1999, with a view to modifying programmes, at an early stage, to make them more in line with funding projections.

7. The Head of Donor Relations and Resource Mobilization Service (DRRM) in his opening remarks highlighted some of the major constraints faced by UNHCR in resource mobilization. He provided delegations with a review of UNHCR's programmes in 1998, emphasizing the difficulties in managing the gap between UNHCR's needs based budget and the availability of resources. The lack of predictability in scheduling contributions and detailed earmarking by donors were also noted as a source of concern to the Office. With regard to earmarking, the Head of DRRMS informed delegations that a paper on this subject had been prepared by UNHCR and was available in the conference room.

8. In response, delegations expressed concern over the reduced level of funding during 1998 and several delegations indicated that efforts would be made to maintain funding levels in 1999. One delegation called for a link to be made between the Global Appeal and funding, and requested an assessment of trends in priorities and the allocation of funds. Several delegations indicated that they were looking forward to receiving details of UNHCR's prioritization exercise in relation to the unified budget. The timing of contributions to UNHCR's programmes was recognized as important and a number of delegations expressed a willingness to explore ways of making funds more predictable. Some concern was expressed over the narrow donor base.

B. Africa

9. Following an oral report by the Chairman on his recent mission to West Africa, the Director of the Bureau for Africa presented a brief overview of UNHCR's activities in Sub-Saharan Africa. The situation in the Great Lakes

region and the Republic of the Congo continued to be tense, with almost 5 million persons affected by the crisis and a potential for large-scale emergency situations. Situations in Guinea Bissau and in Sierra Leone were also volatile. The conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea had left hundreds of individuals in a de facto situation of statelessness, and was a threat to peace and stability in the region. The conflict in Angola had led UNHCR to suspend its repatriation operation in that country in June 1998. In view of these various situations, the Director stressed the need for a continuous and sometimes more vigorous commitment on the part of the international community, and more particularly of regional organizations, towards achieving negotiated peace settlements.

10. Referring to UNHCR's current priorities in Africa, he indicated that immediate attention would be focused on protecting and assisting some 8,000 Liberian refugees still in Sierra Leone, accelerating the voluntary repatriation of those who may wish to return, while following the situation of some 14,000 Sierra Leonean returnees assisted last year to repatriate to Freetown, and monitoring local population displacement. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, concerted efforts were being made through the Office of the Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator to re-establish a United Nations presence inthe eastern part of the country. As a contribution to the reconciliation process in Burundi, efforts were focusing on creating conditions conducive to repatriation. Although limited to some 13,000 in 1998, there were encouraging signs that this movement would gain in momentum. In Southern Africa, alternative durable solutions would be sought for Angolan refugees. Efforts will be made to ensure protection and assistance for some 4,000 Congolese refugees present in Angola.

11. For the longer-term, continued importance would be given to voluntary repatriation. It was hoped that the return of almost 500,000 Liberian refugees would be concluded during the year 2000, subject to prevailing conditions. Since 1998, some 260,000 have returned home mainly from Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, some of them spontaneously, without UNHCR's assistance. He recalled that the repatriation to Northwest Somalia, that had seen an estimated 48,000 refugees leaving camps in eastern Ethiopia, had unfortunately been halted in November 1998, when the authorities in the region of return decided to suspend the operation. Both these cases illustrated the need for sustainable reintegration in countries of origin, in order to bridge the gap from relief to development in post conflict situations.

12. In a number of situations, UNHCR was committed either to scaling down (as in Rwanda), or to phasing out (as in the cases of assistance to Ethiopians who had fled the country prior to 1991, and to Eritrean refugees). Outlining UNHCR's goals for 1999, the Director mentioned a series of priority measures. They included capacity-building, involvement in conflict management and prevention, as well as promoting voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration.

13. In the ensuing discussions, delegations reaffirmed their commitment to supporting both relief efforts and conflict resolution initiatives in Angola, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, Guinea Bissau and the border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia. The fact that UNHCR was involved in preparing or updating contingency plans in some of these countries was also welcomed as an important preparedness

measure. As regards West Africa, delegations acknowledged the important role played by ECOMOG (ECOWAS Monitoring Group) in the sub-region, and encouraged UNHCR to reinforce its involvement in conflict prevention and resolution through increased cooperation with regional and sub-regional organizations.

14. Several delegations made reference to the impact of the presence of refugees on host countries, making special mention of environmental degradation on which technical cooperation and assistance was needed. The renewed commitment to mainstream refugee children and refugee women issues was welcomed. An observer delegation representing NGOs asked that more attention be given to the issue of violence against refugee women. One delegation also requested that the Standing Committee be kept informed of the implementation of the Liberian Children's Initiative.

15. Some delegations voiced concern at the lack of funds in repatriation operations, affecting the reintegration of Liberian, Somali and Ethiopian returnees. It was also stressed that, while seeking the assistance of the international community, countries of origin ought to ensure that conditions for a return in safety and dignity are met.

16. Referring to the current restructuring of the Headquarters Bureau for Africa, one delegation hoped that it would result in a more coordinated approach to UNHCR's activities in Africa.

17. Responding to a number of specific enquiries made in the course of the discussions, the Director of the Bureau for Africa reaffirmed the importance of close coordination at an interagency level. This was particularly relevant in seeking a lasting solution to the Somali crisis. The need for coordination also extended to other intergovernmental agencies, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, to avoid the risk of any duplication in areas such as human rights training. Referring to the concern expressed by some delegations that UNHCR was considering applying the cessation clause to Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees residing in the Sudan, he explained that UNHCR faced a dilemma since the initial cause of flight had disappeared and the need for international protection could no longer be justified. Such a step would only be carried out, however, following consultations with all parties concerned.

18. In conclusion, he paid tribute to the Chairman of the Executive Committee for his recent mission to West Africa, and for the strong commitment conveyed in his report. He appealed to member States for a continued and strengthened political as well as financial support to meet the formidable challenges faced by UNHCR in Africa.

19. In the course of the discussion on policy and developments in Africa, many delegations made reference to the contents of document EC/49/SC/INF.2 on *Security, and Civilian and Humanitarian Character of Refugee Camps and Settlements* which was welcomed as a useful framework for discussions. It was widely acknowledged that the issues are complex and far-reaching.

20. Several delegations spoke in favour of priority being given to the "soft" options, i.e. preventive measures. Here, attention was drawn to links with UNHCR's protection activities, including training in refugee law. One delegation mentioned the importance of capacity-building in procedures relating to the determination of refugee status. Mention was also made of

the important role played by refugees themselves in planning and implementing security measures. In this context the key contribution of refugee women was highlighted. One delegation observed, however, that the success of preventive measures assumed certain favourable conditions which were not always present.

21. On the question of the deployment of civilian or police monitors ("medium" option), several delegations expressed support for the proposal to use multi-national civilian or police observers to conduct monitoring missions. On the other hand, there were strong reservations concerning the deployment of private security agents. One delegation stated that it is imperative to avoid confusion between humanitarian workers and military law enforcement agencies. While complementary, their roles are distinctly different.

22. The Assistant High Commissioner was encouraged to note the interest shown by delegations in the issues, as well as their clear support for preventive measures. Such measures, however, have cost implications which will need to be addressed. Responding to an enquiry from one delegation on the notion of Liaison Groups (para. 14 of document EC/49/SC/INF.2), he explained that UNHCR is in the process of discussing various models. These could include rosters of qualified individuals, or the conclusion of a "Government Package" arrangement.

23. Referring to the link between the safety of humanitarian staff and camp security, he observed that the new Headquarters structure now placed its Field Safety Section within the Department of Operations. Lastly, he recalled that ensuring the security, and civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps is an issue going beyond UNHCR's mandate, requiring the participation of many actors, including States. The options proposed have been developed in consultation with the United Nations Department of Peace-Keeping Operations, as part of the follow-up to the Secretary-General's *Report on the Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa*, issued in April 1998. This is still "work-in-progress". An informal briefing was planned for later in February 1999, to which Executive Committee members were cordially invited.

C. Central Asia, Southwest Asia, North Africa and the Middle East (CASWANAME)

24. The Director of Operations for CASWANAME provided the Standing Committee with a comprehensive presentation of UNHCR's strategies and objectives in the region, recalling that some of the most long-standing and complex refugee problems in the world are to be found here.

25. Significant progress had been made in Central Asia, including accession to international refugee instruments by four of the five Central Asian states, the adoption of national refugee laws and establishment of legal and administrative frameworks at national level to manage asylum seekers and refugees. By contrast, the lack of peace and stability and respect for human rights in Afghanistan continued to prevent the implementation of durable solutions for Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. Increased financial and political support was needed to protect and assist this group. In the Middle East, the instability of the situation in Iraq had led to an increase in the number of asylum seekers in the surrounding region. The situation of Turkish refugees in Iraq had recently improved with UNHCR's

return to Makhmour camp. The return of Iraqi refugees from the Islamic Republic of Iran had been suspended since mid-1998. In Yemen, large numbers of Somali and Ethiopian refugees who arrived last year had required increased assistance and improved screening and registration procedures. As for Western Sahara, the solution of the Sahrawi refugee problem was directly linked to the success of the United Nations Settlement Plan. Meanwhile, activities were being financed from the balance of funds from previous appeals, but should there be a breakthrough allowing implementation of the Settlement Plan, a new Special Appeal would be launched.

26. In the course of the debate, several delegations expressed concern over the lack of progress in finding solutions for Afghan refugees. Referring to the burden placed on countries of asylum, two delegations reiterated the need to study the economic and social impact of the long-term presence of large number of refugees. Some delegations also emphasized the importance of mainstreaming projects benefiting women and children as a key objective for UNHCR. Several delegations welcomed the progress achieved in Central Asia, and congratulated Kazakhstan for their recent accession to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. The relevance of such achievements to the Programme of Action of the Conference of Independent States was also emphasized, and UNHCR was urged to continue to strengthen its contacts with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Concerning activities in the Middle East, one delegation congratulated UNHCR for its efforts at contingency planning in the face of continuing tension over Iraq. Serious concern was expressed, however, by one delegation that the civilian nature of Makhmour camp in northern Iraq was being compromised by the presence of armed infiltrators. Delegations also questioned whether UNHCR offices in countries neighbouring Iraq would be able to manage a potential increase in the number of refugees in the region. Concern was also expressed about the continuing influx of refugees into Yemen. Another delegation noted with appreciation UNHCR's efforts to strengthen its contacts with the Arab League and Organization of the Islamic Conference and suggested this should be pursued. As regards preparations in Western Sahara, a number of delegations suggested that UNHCR should increase the involvement of NGOs, and concert with the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank on the longer-term reintegration needs of the returnees.

27. In his response, the Director of CASWANAME gave details of specific aspects of a number of these operations. He confirmed that efforts are underway in Central Asia to increase the capacity of local NGOs to manage project activities, and to provide support to regional institutions such as the Bishkek Migration Management Centre, in order to create a pool of well trained staff to allow for future handover of activities. In Makhmour camp, UNHCR was present on a daily basis and has agreed on various measures with the government authorities to ensure the civilian nature of the camp. Regarding Afghanistan, the Assistant High Commissioner stressed the need to refocus and re-energize the efforts of the international community towards finding solutions. He would shortly be undertaking a mission in an attempt to unblock the situation. He also drew attention to the critical importance of sufficient financial resources for programmes in the CASWANAME region, beset both by its dangerous security environment, and long standing refugee problems.

D. UNHCR's proposed new budget structure

28. Introducing this item, the Director of the Division of Resource Management drew attention to the latest consultations on UNHCR's budget structure that had taken place on 22 January 1999 (EC/49/SC/CRP.5). He recalled that these consultations had confirmed the agreement on having a unified annual budget structure, with overall agreement on one Operational Reserve (in place of three at present). Implementation of the new budget structure would need to take place in stages since prior and current years would need to be reported against budgets already approved under the current structure. Progress was also linked to work underway on developing and introducing new information systems. He also referred to the forthcoming meeting (17 February 1999) of the ACABQ in New York, at which he would present the new budget structure.

29. In the ensuing discussion, delegations confirmed their support for the new approach, considering that the new structure would result in greater transparency and a sounder management tool. One delegation observed, however, that the guidelines on the use of the Operational Reserve might be too broad and could perhaps be tighter.

30. On the wider issue of resource mobilization, there was consensus that the trend towards increased earmarking, together with the unpredictable nature of levels and timing of contributions, hampered the effectiveness of UNHCR's activities. In this context, one delegation made reference to his Government's efforts to make its contribution known and available at an early stage of the year. Several delegations welcomed the informal paper on the earmarking of contributions and its effect on UNHCR operations which was made available in the room. While acknowledging that Governments had their own constraints as donors, there was consensus that the practice of earmarking should be limited wherever possible.

31. Several delegations welcomed the efforts currently underway by UNHCR to set priorities in order to address gaps between assessed needs and available income. One delegation observed, however, that such an exercise should be associated with strategic planning rather than a budget exercise. Another delegation expressed the hope that the results of this exercise would be shared with the Committee.

32. In response, the Director of Resource Management, and Head of the Donor Relations and Resource Mobilization Service confirmed that the observations made by the ACABQ both on the budget structure and on the issue of earmarking (for which the informal paper was being made available to ACABQ) would be shared with the Committee in further informal consultations. This was a dynamic process, involving continued opportunities for exchange. Meanwhile, the programming instructions already shared with the field contained elements allowing for a budget presentation in October for the year 2000, using the new structure. In conclusion, the Assistant High Commissioner observed that the task of setting priorities was the High Commissioner's responsibility, based on her mandate and on policy guidelines from the Executive Committee. These priorities would be the subject of informal consultations, before presentation to the Executive Committee, in anticipation of firm donor support.

V. PROTECTION/PROGRAMME POLICY

A. Follow-up to the annual theme

33. Introducing this item, the Chairman recalled the extensive debate that had taken place at the Executive Committee's last plenary session. He drew attention to issues emerging from those discussions that warranted further discussion, as identified in document EC/49/SC/INF.1.

34. As prelude to this discussion, one delegation insisted on philosophical and ethical issues associated with the notion of burden-sharing. What was at stake was a basic respect for human dignity, and acceptance of common responsibility as demonstrated through actions of solidarity. Without this dimension, the debate had little meaning.

35. Several delegations expressed support for the protective role of the state through accessions to international instruments, such as the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. Efforts must continue to encourage universal accessions. While one delegation drew attention to the usefulness of burden-sharing mechanisms at a regional level, another pointed out that, as stated in the Chairman's mission report, the refugee problem is a global problem. While a distribution of asylum arrangements may work in one region, such arrangements cannot always succeed on their own, and it is necessary for the international community to collectively address the root causes of refugee producing situations in conjunction with international organisations and other relevant actors.

36. Responding to a general concern for practical examples, the Assistant High Commissioner observed that the Standing Committee's agenda includes a series of specific items with links to burden-sharing. The most topical include solutions to camp security through cooperation at various levels; the campaign for universal adherence to the Convention and Protocol by the end of 2000; multilateral consultations within the context of the CIS conference and of CASWANAME, as well as the European Union's newly created Working Group on asylum and migration (with which UNHCR is associated). He proposed that a paper reflecting these various issues could be prepared in order to highlight specific suggestions such as these.

37. Concluding the debate, the Chairman proposed that this work could be done in consultation with interested delegations, notably one which had expressly offered substantive input. It might also include an inventory of tools and resources, as suggested by another delegation, and thus respond to the general concern for practical applications as opposed to abstract theory.

B. Reintegration

38. The Director of the Division of Communication and Information recalled how, at its last session, the Executive Committee had asked the High Commissioner to keep the Committee informed of initiatives taken to involve other actors, especially development and financial institutions, in the issue of reintegration. These were described in document EC/49/SC/CRP.6.

39. In this context, he drew special attention to the recent Roundtable on the Gap between Humanitarian Assistance and Long-term Development, convened by the President of the Brookings Institution in Washington, and co-sponsored

by UNHCR and the World Bank. It brought together participants from some 30 Governments, international and non-governmental organizations, highlighting the shared involvement of a wide spectrum of humanitarian and development actors. Its purpose was to explore how the international community, in support of national actors, could better ensure a more successful transition from conflict to sustainable development and peace in societies emerging from conflict. The many unmet needs of post-conflict societies and the failed transitions from conflict to real peace and development attested to the inadequacy of the current approaches. The dialogue was premised on the fact that there were currently a number of institutional and funding gaps which were impeding a smooth transition. These points were spelt out in an introductory note by James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, and the High Commissioner, entitled *The Transition to Peace in War-Torn Societies: Some Personal Observations*.

40. Participants in the Roundtable recognized that the issue before them was not new; it had, however, taken on added urgency of late. In spite of how the gap(s) might be conceptualized and articulated, they were, nevertheless, real; they created human displacement and suffering, especially in the form of the desperation of poverty, a society bereft of human rights, and an environment characterized by a fragile peace. The gaps needed to be addressed by a concerted effort and renewed partnerships between the people affected, national actors, multilateral organizations, bi-lateral donors and the non-governmental community. The international community had to organize itself better for this task in terms of institutional arrangements, and flexible, predictable funding arrangements.

41. The Roundtable agreed that the next step should be the formation of a small, representative Action Group to be convened by the President of the Brookings Institution to review further the institutional arrangements for development in post-conflict societies and how to support such a transition through more predictable and timely resources. The meeting of the Action Group was scheduled for 12 March 1999. The Roundtable would review the results of the Action Group's work sometime in the spring; these conclusions would also provide the basis for a broader-based, subsequent meeting which would carry to conclusion the work of the Roundtable and the Action Group.

42. Several delegations expressed their support for these initiatives. While recognizing the importance of placing the institutional and funding gaps on the political agenda of the international community, some delegations stressed the importance of sound planning of reintegration operations, as a key element of the sustainability of the reintegration/reconciliation process. In this connection, they referred to the UNHCR Operational Framework for Repatriation and Reintegration Operations in Post-Conflict Situations, which had been the subject of a series of informal consultations in 1998. The Standing Committee expressed appreciation for the work currently in progress on the Framework, including plans to test it in two or three post-conflict countries, as agreed during the Standing Committee informal consultations. One delegation specifically stressed the importance of reconciliation in the reintegration process and indicated the need to concretely translate this aspect into action through carefully selected and designed community-based reintegration projects and training seminars.

43. Finally, UNHCR was requested to report, at the next Executive Committee session, on progress achieved and constraints encountered in advancing further the inter-agency cooperation as well as in implementing the Operational Framework.

VI. COORDINATION

44. The Head of Secretariat and Inter-Organization Service recalled that th Planning Meeting of the Standing Committee on 8 December 1998 had decided to place this item on the Committee's agenda throughout the year. In accordance with the wishes of the Standing Committee, she proceeded to outline coordination in the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) and the new Humanitarian Segment of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

45. ACC, the oldest of the coordinating bodies, brings together heads of al United Nations specialized and other agencies, funds and programmes, as well as the Bretton Woods institutions. As a forum for discussion and coordination of system-wide action, it currently deals with key issues relating directly or indirectly to the United Nations reform process. The last two ACC sessions have been preceded by private meetings with the Secretary-General, providing a welcome opportunity to discuss issues of common concern in an informal manner. At the initiative of the High Commissioner, the issue of staff safety and security has become a standing item on the ACC agenda. This had led to the adoption of two statements in 1998 underscoring the need to reinforce safety and security measures, particularly training, and the responsibilities of Member States to ensure the safety of United Nations and associated personnel.

46. The IASC seeks to strengthen coordination between humanitarian and othe agencies, including non-United Nations actors. Operating mainly through working or reference groups of varying compositions, it addresses issues such as improvements to the consolidated appeals process, establishing a global database and training module on internally displaced persons, etc. It is serviced by a secretariat situated within the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs, which also supports ECHA. The latter is a new Secretariat body resulting from the United Nations reform process, meeting under the Chairmanship of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. Its agenda focuses on country-specific situations of particular concern to the Security Council.

47. ECOSOC's Humanitarian Segment will meet for the second time in July in Geneva. After a general debate based on the Secretary-General's Report, a second day will be devoted to the theme of "International Cooperation and Coordinated Responses to the Humanitarian Emergencies, in particular, in the transition from Relief to Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Development".

48. Delegations noted that the plethora of coordinating bodies could give rise to confusion, and that more systematic information would be welcome. One delegation regretted the lack of consultation with Geneva on the choice of ECOSOC's humanitarian theme. In response to a question concerning the impact of discussions in these various fora at field level, the Head of Secretariat and Inter-Organization Service acknowledged that there was a tendency for discussions to be Headquarters-driven, but that improvements

were currently underway, notably due to the presence at IASC meetings of humanitarian co-ordinators representing the practical concerns of their respective countries.

VII. GOVERNANCE

49. As a contribution to the process of selecting the Annual Theme for the fiftieth session of the Executive Committee, the following was proposed by one delegation: "Strengthening partnerships to strengthen protection on the ground". It was in keeping with the fiftieth session that the focus should be on protection, while recognizing that ensuring and delivering protection was increasingly complex and could only be achieved through effective partnerships. It was also felt that a theme such as this would build on last year's burden sharing theme.

50. General support was expressed for this proposal. One delegation, supported by several others, suggested that the theme might usefully be expanded to include reference to security issues in view of their bearing on the protection function. A possible formulation might be: "Strengthening of partnerships to promote protection and security on the ground". Other delegations made suggestions as to specific elements that might be covered under such a theme, including peace-building. One delegation was, however, in favour of a more general theme: "Protection in the 21st Century".

51. In summing up the debate, the Chairman noted that there was consensus on the focus on "protection" in combination with "partnerships", but that several delegations were concerned that there should be some practical outcome. It was important to translate theory into guidelines for action. He noted that there was wide support for the theme as initially enunciated, and that several delegations were in favour of including some reference to security issues along the lines proposed in the amended version. He proposed that further contacts should take place with interested delegations on such editorial adjustments, prior to a decision at the June meeting of the Committee.

VIII. MANAGEMENT, FINANCE, OVERSIGHT AND HUMAN RESOURCES

A. Standardization of UNHCR reporting

52. The Director of the Division of Communication and Information recalled that there had been a series of consultations on this subject, and drew attention to a progress report submitted to the Standing Committee giving an account of the subjects covered (EC/49/SC/CRP.7). He recalled how UNHCR's move towards Global Appeals and Global Reports on its programmes had been prompted by a will to rationalize and streamline existing procedures, particularly in light of the multiple reports it was required to produce, including governance documentation and customized donor reports. The new arrangement followed a new reporting cycle linking the Global Appeal and Global Report, Mid-Year Progress Report and periodic Updates on Programmes and Funding. He also drew attention to proposals for a standard narrative report, which would integrate protection more clearly, and focus on results in terms of impact and delivery (Annexes 1 and 2 of EC/49/SC/CRP.7). He then drew attention to a draft decision on the standardization of UNHCR reporting that was now tabled with the Committee for approval.

53. Many delegations expressed their support for these proposals, observing that they should result both in a lighter administrative burden for UNHCR and an improved quality of reports. Some delegations pointed out that specific donor requirements might still call for separate reporting in some cases. One delegation suggested that such individual requirements might be accompanied by donor assistance.

54. One observer delegation, however, recorded reservations as to the changes proposed. He observed that discussions were currently underway in New York aimed at establishing simplified reporting norms for all United Nations agencies. UNHCR's proposals were therefore premature.

55. Several delegations hoped that the new approach would result in more transparent reporting on protection. It was also observed that, as the new standardized reporting was being introduced on a pilot basis, there would be more opportunity for comment and guidance by the Committee.

56. In response, the Director of the Division of Communication and Information confirmed that it was intended to include a budget line for protection activities. He also confirmed that the new arrangement would not be applied retroactively, and that requests for donor reports for contributions made in 1998 would be met. He added that it was not expected that the new reporting procedure would obviate all individual requirements, but drew attention to UNHCR's request for such requirements to be made known in advance.

57. Concluding the discussion, the Chairman assured the Committee that informal discussions would continue on this important subject. Meanwhile, the draft decision presented to the Committee was adopted (see Annex).

B. Enhancement of the evaluation function in UNHCR

58. The Inspector General drew attention to a review of UNHCR's evaluation function undertaken in 1998 by a private firm and a consultant (EC/49/SC/CRP.8). A complementary, internal review of the evaluation function had resulted in relocating the new Evaluation and Policy Analysis Section within the Department of Operations, reporting directly to the Assistant High Commissioner.

59. Delegations expressed their satisfaction with the report, observing that UNHCR's evaluation function had been neglected in the past, as demonstrated by the relatively low level of resources devoted to it. They emphasized the importance of this function in helping the Organization to take full advantage of lessons learned through experience. This was of special value for field staff, especially those working in isolated areas. They welcomed the place given to this function within the new Headquarters structure.

60. Several delegations also drew attention to the need for increased transparency, stressing that evaluation reports should be made readily available not only to all UNHCR staff, but to Executive Committee members, United Nations agencies and other interested parties. On the issue of resources, it was acknowledged that additional funds and qualified staff were needed. However, these might be found through joint evaluations using expertise made available by donors, for example. Some delegations pledged their support for such an approach.

61. Referring to the provisional work programme for 1999 (EC/49/SC/CRP.8/Add.1), several delegations expressed their concern not to find included a strategic Plan of Action specifying how the recommendations will be implemented. It was acknowledged that implementation will need to be progressive as all could not take place at once. However, it was essential to specify timeframes and responsibilities and estimate costs.

62. The Inspector General took note of these suggestions. On the issue of distribution of evaluation reports, he recalled that a commitment had already been made at the last session of the Executive Committee. There were cost implications, however, and the possibility of making the reports available electronically would be examined. He also mentioned that more resources were being allocated to self evaluation at operational level under the proposed OMS.

63. Concluding the discussion, the Chairman observed that there was general consensus on the fact that improvement is needed, and that UNHCR still has some way to go. There was also agreement on proposals for joint evaluations, transparency in distribution of reports and a draft Plan of Action. The first round of informal consultations should take place in the coming months, and a Plan of Action be prepared before the next debate on evaluation in the Standing Committee.

C. Safety and security of staff

64. The Deputy High Commissioner emphasized the paramount importance of staff safety, drawing attention to an update of issues contained in document EC/49/SC/INF.3. In this context, he drew special attention to the immense relief caused by the recent release of Mr. Vincent Cochetel after 11 months of captivity, and expressed deep gratitude for the sustained support of members of the Executive Committee throughout this ordeal. Training remained an important element of UNHCR's efforts to protect its staff. However, the responsibility of States and authorities on the ground was crucial. When this could not be guaranteed, the support of member States remained essential.

65. Several delegations endorsed the importance of training, and the need for close coordination at the interagency level. This was also highlighted in a statement by an observer from a United Nations agency, with special mention of coordinated efforts with the United Nations Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD). Delegations also re-emphasized the importance of the support of member States. One delegation mentioned that the longer-term goal must be to secure a safer environment, and that the Security Council must be involved in this.

66. Welcoming the recent entry into application of the Convention on Safety of the United Nations and Associated Personnel, one delegation also confirmed the importance of adequate funding for staff security, pledging a contribution to the Trust Fund for this purpose. Another delegation supported the call for funding and asked for an estimate of costs involved.

67. Concluding the discussion, the Deputy High Commissioner thanked the Standing Committee for its many expressions of concern on this important issue. He also confirmed that, at the administrative level, preparations were underway to create a separate budget line dedicated to funds required for security, as recommended by ACC.

IX. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

68. The Chairman informed delegations that the General Assembly decided last year to increase the number of members of the Executive Committee to 54. Mozambique was expected to soon become the 54th member. In addition, the Chairman informed delegations that Côte d'Ivoire is seeking membership in the Executive Committee and that this request is being considered by the Economic and Social Council in New York.

69. There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting.

DECISION ADOPTED BY THE FOURTEENTH STANDING COMMITTEE

STANDARDIZATION OF UNHCR REPORTING

The Standing Committee,

Recalling the strong endorsement by Members of the Executive Committee during the thirteenth meeting of the Standing Committee on 2 October 1998 to hold consultations on the standardization of UNHCR reporting, and having considered the outcome of the consultations on the issue (EC/49/SC/CRP.7),

Recognizing the burden placed on UNHCR as a result of multiple and disaggregated reporting requirements, including customized donor reporting,

Emphasizing the need to streamline the preparation and formats of UNHCR reports with a view to contributing to greater efficiencies,

Noting UNHCR's efforts towards a comprehensive presentation of the Organization's global requirements, achievements and constraints in appeals and reports that provide a global perspective of the work of the Office,

Reiterating the importance in this regard of the Global Appeal and the preparation of a Global Report on UNHCR's programmes worldwide,

Welcoming the presentation for the first time in 1998 of a Mid-Year Progress Report on UNHCR's programmes, which provided an update on the achievements and constraints of programmes during the first six months of the year, as well as adjustments necessitated by the operational environment and funding constraints and thus allowed Members of the Executive Committee to set funding priorities accordingly,

Recognizing that the availability of comprehensive, quality information on the use of resources provided to the Office could contribute to more predictable funding of UNHCR,

Emphasizing that reporting on UNHCR's programmes requires a strong focus on protection activities, impact, actions aimed at gender mainstreaming, and the implementation of UNHCR's policies on women, children and adolescents as well as the environment,

(a) Requests that, starting in 1999, UNHCR present to Members of the Executive Committee a Global Report in June of the year following programme implementation and a Mid-Year Progress Report in August of the year of programme implementation; this will be followed in November by the issuance of the Global Appeal for the programmes of the following year;

(b) Asks that the contents of the narrative and format of the financial parts of the report follow the outlines considered by the Standing Committee on 9-11 February 1999 and presented in Annexes I and II to EC/49/SC/CRP.7;

(c) Notes that the Global Report aims at providing the basis for reporting on the use of donor contributions and, in this respect, at replacing the customized narrative and financial reports so far submitted to donors by UNHCR's Funding and Donor Relations Service, effective for reports due in 1999 for contributions provided during the 1998 programme year;

(d) Requests that:

(i) Any reporting requirements that go beyond the Global Report be brought to UNHCR's attention in a timely fashion;

(ii) UNHCR and the donor concerned agree on the specific arrangements to address such requirements, including possible resources required;

(e) Recommends that having given Members of the Executive Committee time to consider the first Global Report, a review take place during the fiftieth session of the Executive Committee with a view to enhancing UNHCR's reporting efficiency and effectiveness, and streamlining the production of documentation as well as ensuring that the Global Report covers the areas of interest of Members of the Executive Committee.